ECHOES OF GRACE

BY: FRANK JONES BALABA

Frank Balaba

Echoes of Grace

Copyright © 2026 by Frank Balaba

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

First edition

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy
Find out more at reedsy.com

Whoever you are, wherever you may be, and whatever journey you are walking through at this moment.

This book is dedicated to those quiet moments in life when the heart pauses to reflect—when questions arise, when hope feels fragile, and when meaning is searched for in the ordinary rhythm of days.

Perhaps you opened these pages out of curiosity, perhaps out of restlessness, or perhaps simply in search of a moment of silence in a noisy world.

Contents

Preface

Introduction

1. Paano mo hahalukayin ang kabutihan sa mundong ganito?

2. He is simply asking you to let Him carry the world with you.

3. Life rarely gives healing in the order we expect. Reflection from the gospel of Mark 2: 1-12

4. If the Beatitudes unsettle us, that is because they are doing their job.

5. "Why does this generation seek a sign?" A reflection from the Gospel of Mark 8:11–13

6. "Lord, when my mouth can no longer utter any words, then let my tears be my prayers."

About the Author

Also by Frank Balaba

Preface

Some thoughts arrive loudly, like waves crashing upon the shore. Others come quietly, like a whisper in the stillness of the night. This small collection of reflections belongs to the latter. Echoes of Grace was not written in a single moment of inspiration, nor was it originally intended to become a book. Rather, it grew slowly—one reflection at a time—through moments of prayer, silence, struggle, and wonder.

Many of the pieces gathered here were first written as articles and personal reflections shared on Medium and in other spaces where words become a bridge between experience and meaning. They were born from ordinary moments: a Gospel passage read in quiet meditation, a question raised in the midst of study, a conversation that lingered in the mind, or a realization that appeared in the silence of the heart. Over time, these scattered reflections began to form something like a journey—an attempt to listen more carefully to the movements of grace in everyday life.

The title Echoes of Grace reflects the spirit of these writings. Grace often does not announce itself with certainty or clarity. Instead, it echoes through the small experiences of life: in moments of doubt, in unexpected hope, in the search for meaning, and even in silence. These reflections are not answers to life's deepest questions, but rather humble attempts to listen to those echoes and give them words.

As a young seminarian and a student continually searching for understanding, writing has become one of the ways I reflect upon faith, life, and the human experience. In these pages, you will find thoughts shaped by prayer, philosophy, Scripture, and the simple realities of daily life. They are imperfect reflections—honest attempts to articulate what it means to seek truth, to wrestle with questions, and to encounter grace in the midst of the ordinary.

This book does not aim to teach as much as it hopes to accompany. If these reflections succeed in doing anything, may it be this: to invite you, the reader, to pause for a moment in the noise of the world and listen for the quiet echoes of grace in your own life.

For in the end, grace is always present. Sometimes we only need silence to hear it.

Introduction

Life is often lived in movement—days passing quickly, responsibilities unfolding one after another, and thoughts left unspoken in the quiet corners of the mind. Yet in the midst of this constant motion, there are moments that invite us to pause. Moments when a question arises, when a line from Scripture lingers in the heart, or when a simple experience reveals something deeper about life and faith. It is within these moments of pause that reflection begins.

Echoes of Grace is a collection of reflections and essays written over time, many of which were first shared as articles on Medium. Each piece was born from a particular moment of contemplation—sometimes inspired by the Gospel, sometimes by philosophical thought, and sometimes by the simple experiences of daily life. Though they were written at different times and for different occasions, they share a common thread: a desire to understand the quiet ways grace moves within the human story.

The reflections gathered here do not claim to offer definitive answers. Instead, they explore questions that many of us carry: questions about faith, hope, purpose, struggle, and the search for meaning. They are written from the perspective of someone still learning, still listening, and still walking the path of discovery. In many ways, this book is not a conclusion but a record of a journey—a journey of thought, prayer, and reflection.

The title *Echoes of Grace* captures the spirit of these writings. Grace is not always dramatic or obvious. More often, it appears gently in the ordinary moments of life: in silence, in struggle, in the beauty of reflection, and even in the uncertainty that invites deeper understanding. These moments may seem small, but they leave echoes—quiet reminders that there is something greater present within our everyday lives.

This book invites the reader into that same spirit of reflection. The essays and reflections can be read slowly, one at a time, allowing each piece to become a moment of pause. Some may resonate immediately; others may simply plant a thought that grows over time. What matters most is not agreement with every idea, but the opportunity to reflect together on the deeper dimensions of life and faith.

In a world that often encourages speed and noise, reflection becomes a kind of quiet resistance. It is an act of listening—to one's own heart, to the experiences of life, and perhaps even to the subtle movements of grace that accompany us along the way.

May these pages serve as small companions in that journey of reflection.

1

Paano mo hahalukayin ang kabutihan sa mundong ganito?

In the past few days, the gospels were all about the end of the world, about trials, tribulations, signs in the heavens, and the shaking of everything. These readings can easily make us uneasy. They expose how fragile life is and how uncertain the world can become. It feels as though Jesus is holding up a mirror, showing us not just cosmic signs but the reality of our own society: the wars we hear about, the corruption that destroys trust, the violence that steals peace, and the moral decay that slowly eats away at our humanity. One does not need to look far to see signs that feel like the world is collapsing; sometimes, all it takes is to scroll through our social media.

Just yesterday, I came across a video on Facebook

BRIGADA
HAPPY 80TH BIRTHDAY TATAY DIGONG
BRING HIM BACK
I STAND FOR PRRD
www.brigadanews.ph
Barangay Captain shot dead during Facebook live in Davao del Sur

https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/regions/967485/barangay-captain-in-digos-city-shot-dead-during-facebook-live/story/?
lkETFnUHp5ZEQ1Zk5VOHJ6Snowc3JoYwZhcHBfaWQQMjIyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHptFWPVMDjag
r5rjUCwh66_aem_rBUgiDqaepwmZJTFRrKG5A

A live stream recording that has haunted me ever since. It was the shocking moment when a barangay captain in Digos was shot dead while streaming live. He was speaking casually, unaware that those few minutes would be his last, unaware that the world was about to witness his death in real time. Watching it felt like witnessing a public execution. It disturbed me deeply. I found myself asking, ***"Is this what our world has become? Ganito na lang ba kadali ang pumatay? Ganito na lang ba kamura ang buhay ng tao?"*** The cruelty and suddenness of it shook me. And as the comments poured in—some grieving, some angry, some disturbingly indifferent—I couldn't help but think: ***"What is happening to our society?"*** How did we arrive at a point where violence has become entertainment, where human life can be extinguished in seconds, in front of thousands who can only watch?

GOSPEL REFLECTION

In the Gospel of Matthew 24:32-35, right after all these warnings about turmoil and destruction, Jesus shifts the tone. He does not speak about terror or fear. ***"He speaks instead of a fig tree beginning to blossom."*** It seems almost out of place." Why talk about something as gentle and quiet as a fig tree right after describing the end of the world? But perhaps that is exactly the point. Jesus is reminding us that even in the midst of chaos, there are signs of hope, subtle, fragile, easily overlooked, but real. A fig tree does not bloom loudly. It grows slowly, patiently, quietly. And maybe that is how the Kingdom of God enters our world, not through dramatic headlines, not through viral videos, but through small acts of kindness that refuse to die.

While evil often appears loud, violent, and immediate, goodness is quite the opposite.

Love does not force itself into our screens. And yet Jesus directs our eyes to the small, humble signs because they reveal God's presence in a world that feels increasingly godless. He invites us to look deeper and not drown in despair. He reminds us that the cruelty we see, no matter how overwhelming, is not the final word. The world may be shaking, but the fig tree is still blooming. Hope is still alive.

We cannot control the world, but we can choose how we respond to it.

We cannot stop all violence. We cannot personally end corruption. We cannot prevent every act of evil. But we can decide whether or not we allow the cruelty around us to harden our hearts. Kindness, in a world that is losing its humanity, becomes an act of resistance. When we choose compassion over anger, forgiveness over revenge, empathy over indifference, we become like that blooming fig tree—silent but powerful, fragile yet full of life.

In the midst of all this, I remember a question once asked by Bro. Hansel during meditation: "If Jesus were to ask you, 'What can I do for you?' ano ang isasagot mo?"

At first, hindi ko talaga siya na-gets. Inaantok pa ako, lutang pa ulo ko. I didn't even have a word to answer it. Pero siguro, through grace or maybe through something deeper inside me that I never noticed before, I answered: **"Allow me to see good in all things."**

It sounded simple, but when I thought about it again... **ang hirap pala nun.** "See good in all things?" In a world like ours? With everything that is happening? Parang impossible. Because how do you see the good when everything feels like it's falling apart?

How do you see the good when corruption feels like it's everywhere and people who should protect us are the ones taking advantage?

How do you see the good when sa mismong social media, you witness a man shot dead on live stream?

How do you see the good when people are suffering, when families are breaking, when mental health is collapsing, when violence is becoming normal?

Paano mo hahalukayin ang kabutihan sa mundong ganito?

The honest answer? **We don't always see it. Sometimes, we can't.** And I think Jesus knows that. He's not asking us to pretend that the world is perfect. He's not asking us to deny reality. He's not asking us to walk around na parang everything is sunshine and rainbows. Jesus isn't delusional. He knows the world is chaotic. He knows that if He were to walk down here right now, ang sasalubong sa Kanya ay hindi choir ng mga seminarista, pari,at madre, but traffic, impatience, political arguments, Facebook trolls, crimes, and suffering.

But maybe... maybe the whole point of seeing the fig tree bloom is that **God doesn't wait for the world to be perfect before He shows us hope.**

He doesn't wait for a peaceful society.
He doesn't wait for corruption to end.
He doesn't wait for violence to disappear.
He doesn't wait for the world to be calm.

The fig tree blooms in the middle of everything, not after.

And maybe that's what Jesus wants us to remember.

Kindness becomes more powerful **because** the world is unkind.
Forgiveness becomes more meaningful **because** hatred is loud.
Compassion becomes more necessary **because** people are hurting.
And hope becomes more real **because** the world is afraid.

We usually think na ang kabutihan dapat easy. Pero hindi. Kindness is difficult. Forgiveness is difficult. Maintaining a soft heart in a hard world is difficult. Matod pa sa labing halangdong Obispo Raul Dael, nga kung sa taliwala sa kalisud, gipili nato mag higugma anaa diha ang tinoud nga grasya. When we find ourselves in the midst of pain, suffering, and chaos—and still choose to love—that is where true grace reveals itself.

And when I prayed, "Lord, allow me to see good in all things," siguro ang totoong meaning nun is not that I should see good everywhere, but that I should learn to look for it—kahit minsan hindi ko makita agad. Maybe the prayer is not about finding good instantly, but about learning to believe that good is still possible.

Because at the end of the day, we're not asked to be heroes. We're not asked to save the world.

We're not asked to fix society.

But we are asked not to let the world corrupt our hearts.

We are asked to stay human in a world losing its humanity.
We are asked to be a small sign of hope like the fig tree fig tree lang.

And maybe that's enough

Maybe that's enough for Jesus

Maybe that's enough to keep the world from completely falling apart.
Because even if the world is noisy with fear, **kindness still whispers.**

Even if the world is violent, **someone out there is choosing peace.**
Even if the world feels dark, **someone somewhere is choosing to be light.**
Even if the world is shaking, **the fig tree is quietly blooming.**

And that is enough to remind us that God is still here.

Working.

Moving.

Loving.

And planting hope—even in the ruins.

2

He is simply asking you to let Him carry the world with you.

The hardest pill I had to swallow this year was realizing life won't pause for you, no matter how heavy everything feels. But at the same time, I learned that even when you're tired, overwhelmed, or breaking under expectations, you still have to stand for yourself. Because at the end of the day, when the pressure fades and the noise settles, the only person who will always choose you, fight for you, and believe in you... is you.

There comes a point in life when the weight becomes too heavy

When your heart feels stretched thin, when your mind becomes a battleground of expectations, and when your days feel like an endless series of things you must survive rather than moments you can savor. We rarely talk about it, but life has a way of demanding so much from us: responsibilities, roles, commitments, pressures, expectations. And the painful truth is that life does not slow down simply because we are hurting. Time does not take a pause when we are overwhelmed. The world keeps spinning even when our own world feels like it's falling apart.

> *And so we learn to stand. We learn to push through. We learn to choose ourselves because sometimes, no one else will do it for us.*

Yet even in that strength, there is a subtle exhaustion that creeps in, the kind that doesn't show on the face but settles deep in the soul. We wake up already tired, we move through the day half-present, and we fall asleep with worries still whispering in the corners of our minds. Many of us carry burdens we never talk about. Many of us fight battles no one sees.

"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened..."

He does not say, come to me only when you're strong, or come to me only when you have figured everything out, or come to me only when you feel worthy. Jesus, invites us exactly in our exhaustion.

> Exactly in our breaking.
> Exactly in our mess.

In this gospel Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus do es not ask us to pretend. He does not ask us to hide our fatigue or to wear masks of strength. Instead, He invites us to rest, not the kind of rest that simply pauses our responsibilities, but the kind that touches the soul, the kind that brings healing where we didn't even know we were wounded. Resting in God is not passive. It does not mean we run away from life or deny our responsibilities. It means we stop carrying the weight alone.

“Take my yoke upon you… for my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”

A yoke is something that binds two beings together so they can share the load. Jesus never promised a life without burdens, He promised a life where we never have to bear them by ourselves. He steps beside us, shoulder to shoulder, carrying the heaviest part of the weight. And this is where your experience and the gospel meet:

You learned to stand for yourself because life didn’t stop.

But Jesus teaches that strength doesn’t have to be isolated. That choosing yourself and choosing God are not opposites but companions. That your ability to fight for yourself comes from the One who fights silently with you. Every time you kept going despite feeling empty, His grace was the quiet force pushing your tired feet forward. Every time you held yourself together when breaking felt easier, His presence was the unspoken strength holding you. Every time you chose to rise again, it was not only your will, it was His love, lifting you gently. In the end, you may feel like the only person who truly chooses you is yourself. And on a human level, that is true, no one else can live your life or carry your inner battles. But spiritually, there is someone who has always chosen you, long before you learned to choose yourself.

He chooses you in your weakness.
He chooses you in your tiredness.
He chooses you in your battles.
He chooses you every single day.

And because He chose you first, you find the strength to choose yourself again.
The gospel reminds us that rest is not found in escape but in surrender,
not surrender as defeat, but surrender as trust. Trust that you are not walking this
heavy life alone. Trust that even when life does not pause,
God’s compassion always does. Trust that even when the world demands
constant strength, God welcomes your brokenness with gentleness.

> So come to Him,
> with your burdens,
> with your tired heart,
> with the weight you’ve been carrying silently.

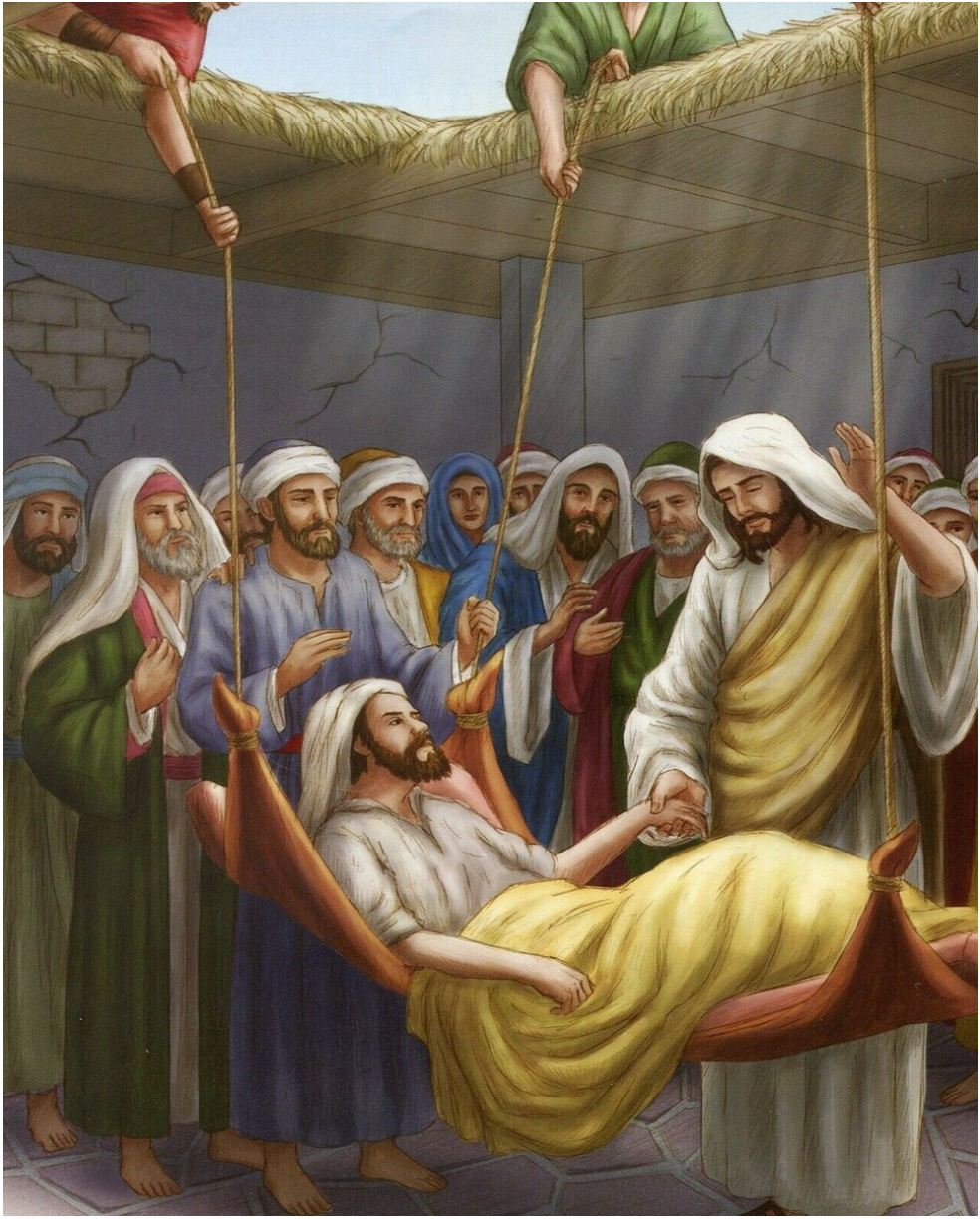
He is not asking you to be perfect.

He is simply asking you to let Him carry the world with you.

3

Life rarely gives healing in the order we expect. Reflection from the gospel of Mark 2: 1-12

If I were that paralytic man, I imagine I would already be exhausted before even meeting Jesus. Not just because I couldn't walk, but because of everything that came before that moment.



Being carried. Being lifted. Feeling the weight of my own body on the shoulders of friends who chose to bring me anyway. And maybe, somewhere in my head, the quiet thought: Am I a burden to them? Every step they take is because of me. Every drop of sweat is because I cannot move on my own. Not to mention the struggle of entering the house. The crowd. The noise. The feeling of being so close, yet completely blocked. And still, they don't give up on me. They climb the roof. They break it open. They lower me down, fully exposed, in front of everyone.

No dignity left. No hiding place.

If that were me, I would already be holding on to one hope: At least now, Jesus will heal me.

But then you will hear the first words from His mouth:

"Your sins are forgiven."

I can almost imagine the look on my face. Surprised. Confused. Maybe even irritated. There would probably be a pause after that moment. Not applause. Not amazement. Just a long, stillness... uncomfortable stillness. The friends who carried the paralytic guy might glance at each other.

Was this it? Was this worth the climb, the risk, the damage?

Did they misunderstand what kind of healing this man needed? I mean, hearing that your sins are forgiven is beautiful. It's grace. It's something holy, or should I say heavenly. But that's not why I came. That's not why my friends carried me this far. That's notwhy the roof was broken open.

> I came to walk again. To stand on my own feet. To gain back my life. I came because I was tired of lying down. Tired of being dependent. Tired of watching life move while I stayed still. I came because I wanted a future that didn't involve a mat.

Maybe because Jesus knows that walking again means nothing if I still carry guilt inside me. Maybe because there is a deeper paralysis than the one everyone can see. A paralysis of shame, of believing I am broken, of thinking I deserve this life on the floor.

Jesus heals that first.

Only then does He say, "Stand up." And when the man finally stands, he carries the very mat that once carried him. The thing that symbolized his weakness becomes something he no longer depends on. He walks out in front of everyone— healed, and restored. The mat is picked up not as a trophy, but because it no longer has a purpose. It has done its job. It is no longer needed. And the man leaves. Not running. Not celebrating. Just walking. As if learning how to exist again.

Life rarely gives healing in the order we expect.

Sometimes, the most urgent need is not what we see, but what we feel inside. That sometimes freedom, growth, and strength begin with forgiveness—of ourselves, of our failures, of the parts of life we think are unfixable. We cannot carry everything alone. Sometimes we need friends to lift us, even if we feel like a burden. Sometimes we need courage to let others take the first step for us. And sometimes we need to allow ourselves to be lowered into the presence of grace, even if it is messy, inconvenient, or exposes our weakness. Healing does not always look like what we imagined. It might start quietly, inside, in a place no one else can see. It might begin with

forgiveness before strength, acceptance before movement, courage before results. And when we finally stand, when we finally move forward, we carry our past not as a chain but as proof that we made it. That what once weighed us down can now be transformed into strength. So whatever your mat is, the fear, the shame, the past mistakes, don't hide it. Don't bury it. Let it meet the light. Let it be lifted. And let it teach you how to walk again, fully and freely. Because life always begins when we stop waiting for everything to be perfect—and start trusting that

healing can arrive in its own time, in its own way, and in a way that transforms not

just what we see, but who we are.

4

If the Beatitudes unsettle us, that is because they are doing their job.

We were having dinner in the seminary refectory, when I heard the news about a newborn baby killed by his own teenage father. Another infant abandoned on a bridge, wrapped inside a bag, treated like something to be disposed of. A newborn left among garbage. A mother and her innocent toddler brutally murdered. Then, as if these stories were not enough, political chaos continues to unfold — accusations, counter-accusations, power plays, statements, noise. So much noise.

And last February 1, 2026 the gospel were about:

For as a seminarian like, it is unusual to feel that the words do not comfort instead they irritate. They feel disconnected from reality, almost offensive. Blessed? How can anyone dare to use that word when babies are being thrown away and families are being slaughtered? How can Jesus speak of blessing when the ground feels soaked with blood?

Yet the more uncomfortable the Beatitudes become, the more honest they are. Jesus does not speak these words to people who are safe. He speaks them to people who are exhausted, oppressed, grieving, and confused. He speaks them to people who know what it means to live in a world where life is cheap and power decides who matters. He does not say these words to numb pain. He says them to name it.

"Blessed are those who mourn."

Mourning is not weakness. It is refusal. Refusal to accept violence as normal. Refusal to scroll past tragedy without being disturbed. Refusal to live as if these deaths are just statistics. When I feel enraged reading about abandoned newborns, that rage is not faithlessness. It is the natural response of a conscience that still works.

If we stop mourning, we stop being human.

In the Philippines today, mourning feels endless. We mourn not only the dead but the systems that failed them. We mourn the absence of protection, education, accountability, and care. We mourn how easily life is discarded, not only physically, but socially, morally, spiritually. Babies are abandoned not only because of poverty, but because responsibility has collapsed. Families are destroyed not only by criminals, but by indifference.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit."

This is not about being humble in a gentle, polite way. Poverty of spirit is standing in front of all this and admitting that something is deeply wrong and we do not know how to fix it. It is recognizing that no amount of political debate, online outrage, or moral posturing can undo the damage that has already been done. The ongoing political chaos in the country makes this painfully clear. Everyone claims to be right. Everyone claims to be fighting for the people. Yet while leaders struggle for influence, the most vulnerable are invisible. Babies do not have a voice in political discourse. Toddlers do not trend. Grieving mothers do not win elections. Poverty of spirit is realizing that power without conscience is useless. Jesus does not bless confidence. He blesses emptiness, the kind that knows it cannot save itself.

"Blessed are the meek."

This line is hard to swallow when anger feels justified. When children are murdered, meekness sounds like an insult. It feels like an invitation to be quiet, to soften our response, to move on. But meekness is not silence. It is control. It is the refusal to let rage turn us into the same kind of people who can destroy life without hesitation. We are right to be angry. But anger that has no direction becomes destructive. It turns into cruelty, mob mentality, and dehumanization. It starts demanding blood instead of justice. Meekness keeps anger human. It demands accountability without becoming violent. It insists that justice must heal, not simply punish. This matters because violence does not come out of nowhere. Teenage fathers do not wake up one day and

decide to kill unless something has already failed, family, education, guidance, community, mental health support. That does not excuse the act. But ignoring the roots guarantees repetition.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness."

This is not about being morally superior. It is about being sick of the way things are. Sick of apologies that mean nothing. Sick of outrage that fades. Sick of systems that react only after someone dies. Righteousness, here, is not abstract holiness. It is a concrete protection of life. It is a society where no mother feels so alone that abandoning a child feels like the only option. Where no teenager is so lost that killing feels possible. Where no family becomes collateral damage to negligence and indifference.

> Hunger means dissatisfaction. It means refusing to accept that this is just "how the world is." It means refusing to normalize the deaths of the innocent.

"Blessed are the merciful."

Mercy is the most misunderstood word in moments like this. Mercy does not mean pretending nothing happened. It does not mean erasing consequences. Mercy means addressing brokenness at its roots instead of only reacting to its symptoms. Mercy means caring enough about human dignity to prevent future violence, not just condemn past violence. A society that only knows how to punish but not how to protect has already failed. Jesus does not offer solutions in the Beatitudes. He offers a way of seeing. He tells us who God stands with — not the powerful, not the loud, not the secure, but the wounded, the grieving, the desperate, and the ones who still care enough to be disturbed. That is why the Beatitudes, for me, feel uncomfortable. They do not allow distance. They pull us into responsibility. To read the beatitudes today is to feel exposed.

> *It forces us to ask what kind of people we are becoming. Have we learned to live with horror too easily? Have we accepted cruelty as background noise? Have we mistaken outrage for action and opinion for responsibility?*

Jesus does not promise that suffering will end quickly. He promises that suffering is not ignored. And in that promise is a quiet but terrifying challenge: if God refuses to abandon the broken, then so must we. The beatitudes do not soothe anger. It gives it direction. It insists that mourning must lead somewhere, that hunger for righteousness must turn into commitment, and that faith must show itself in how fiercely we defend life when it is most fragile.

If the Beatitudes unsettle us, that is because they are doing their job.

They remind us that holiness is not found in comfort, but in refusing to look away. That blessing does not mean approval of suffering, but God's presence within it. And that in a country scarred by political chaos and unbearable violence, the most radical act of faith may simply be this:

to remain human, to keep mourning, and to insist — stubbornly, painfully — that every life still matters.

5

“Why does this generation seek a sign?” A reflection from the Gospel of Mark 8:11–13

There is a particular kind of exhaustion that comes not from labor, but from repetition—the exhaustion of explaining something that should already be clear. In the Gospel, before Jesus answers, before He refuses, before He leaves, He sighs. It is a detail so small we almost overlook it. But that sigh carries weight. The Pharisees approach Him demanding a sign from heaven. Not teaching. Not a conversation. A sign. Something spectacular. Something undeniable. Something that would force certainty upon everyone watching.

And Jesus responds, "Why does this generation seek a sign?"

Notice the phrasing: not **"*these Pharisees*, but *this generation*".** The question widens. It stretches beyond the immediate confrontation and becomes diagnostic. It exposes a posture of the heart, a collective tendency to demand spectacle instead of exercising discernment. The irony is sharp. The blind had seen. The sick had been healed. The hungry had been fed. Mercy had already unfolded before their eyes. Yet what they wanted was not truth, it was confirmation according to their terms. They wanted heaven to perform on command.

Christ refuses. He does not argue extensively. He does not negotiate. He simply declines and leaves. That departure is haunting. It suggests that when a generation insists on spectacle over sincerity, even miracles become meaningless.I find this unsettling because it feels uncomfortably contemporary.

https://www.facebook.com/share/v/18X3w1kw6X/

Recently, when Sara Duterte announced her intention to run for president in 2028, the country reacted almost instantly. Supporters framed it as continuity. Critics framed it as a concern. Social media erupted in declarations, predictions, and emotional certainties. The announcement itself became a kind of sign, interpreted by many as either inevitable triumph or impending crisis. And I felt resistance. A tightening. A hesitation rooted not merely in personality but in questions of history, governance, and trajectory. Yet I also realized how quickly my reaction formed. The speed of modern discourse does not allow for slow discernment. We are trained to respond immediately

—to align, to oppose, to declare. And in that atmosphere, Christ's question echoes again:

Why does this generation seek a sign?

Perhaps because signs are easier than standards. A sign relieves us from the burden of critical evaluation. It tells us what to think. It offers clarity without complexity. But leadership—real leadership—cannot be measured by spectacle alone. The generation of Jesus demanded a sign from heaven. Our generation often demands signs from headlines. Poll numbers become omens. Endorsements become prophecy. Political surnames become symbols of destiny. We interpret announcements as if they were revelations.

But what if the deeper issue is not the announcement itself, but our hunger for spectacle?

Søren Kierkegaard warned that "the crowd is untruth." His concern was not that people are incapable of wisdom, but that collective emotion often replaces individual responsibility. When everyone is reacting, few are reflecting. When the crowd moves, the individual conscience can easily dissolve into it.

In Philippine politics, personality often overshadows policy. Legacy sometimes eclipses lived accountability. Charisma can dominate discourse more easily than competence. And in that environment, the temptation is to search for signs—dramatic gestures that reassure us, or dramatic fears that alarm us.

But Christ's refusal in the Gospel suggests something profound: the problem is not the absence of evidence; it is the refusal to examine what already exists. Hannah Arendt once reflected on the danger of thoughtlessness—the failure to think critically about systems and decisions that shape society. She argued that evil can flourish not only through malice but through the simple absence of reflection. When citizens stop evaluating and start reacting, accountability weakens.

> And accountability is precisely what our generation must prioritize.

If we take the Gospel seriously, then the lesson is not merely spiritual but civic. Instead of asking for signs—dramatic declarations of strength, bold rhetoric, sweeping promises—this generation should demand credibility. A consistent record. Transparent governance. Measurable outcomes. A willingness to submit to scrutiny.

Instead of signs, we should demand accountability. A leader must not only inspire but answer. Not only command but explain. Not only project power but demonstrate responsibility. Power without accountability corrodes institutions slowly and quietly.

Instead of signs, we should demand qualification. Competence is not glamorous. It does not trend.

It does not go viral. But it sustains nations. Plato feared the collapse of democracy when appetite overrides reason—when citizens choose what feels powerful over what proves capable. The danger is not always tyranny; sometimes it is simply incompetence elevated by emotion.

My personal resistance to certain political trajectories is not rooted in hatred. It is rooted in concern—concern about patterns, about institutional health, about the future we are shaping. But the Gospel challenges even my resistance. It demands that my position be thoughtful, not reactive. Principled, not impulsive. Because being "against" something is not automatically virtuous. It must be grounded in reasoned discernment.

Jesus sighs because the generation before Him refused to see what was already present. I fear that our generation sometimes refuses to examine what is already documented. Records of governance exist. Histories exist. Public actions exist. These are not hidden signs; they are visible realities. Yet we often bypass them in favor of narratives.

> *A sign dazzles. Credibility endures. A sign excites. Accountability stabilizes. A sign captures attention. Qualification safeguards the future.*

The Philippines stands at a crossroads not only of leadership but of maturity. Will we continue to interpret politics as spectacle? Or will we cultivate a deeper civic culture—one that evaluates carefully, remembers honestly, and decides responsibly? Christ's question remains piercing because it is not merely about miracles. It is about posture. Do we approach leadership demanding entertainment, or demanding integrity? Do we interpret announcements as destiny, or as proposals subject to scrutiny?

> **"Why does this generation seek a sign?"**

Perhaps the better response is this: this generation should not seek signs at all. It should seek leaders whose credibility can withstand investigation. It should seek leaders who welcome accountability rather than resist it. It should seek leaders qualified not merely by inheritance or influence, but by competence and character. Jesus leaves the Pharisees without granting their demand. It is a silent warning: when we insist on spectacle, we may miss substance entirely. And perhaps the most faithful response to the Gospel in our political moment is not applause, not outrage, but discernment—slow, critical, courageous discernment.

Because a nation built on signs will always chase the next spectacle.

But a nation built on credibility, accountability, and qualification might finally learn to recognize leadership not by its noise, but by its integrity.

6

“Lord, when my mouth can no longer utter any words, then let my tears be my prayers.”

We human beings have always struggled with the limits of language. Words, though powerful, often fail to capture the depth of human experience. In moments of profound suffering, grief, or even overwhelming joy, the human heart discovers that words collapse under the weight of emotion. What emerges instead are tears—an expression older and more primal than speech itself.We human beings have always struggled with the limits of language. Words, though powerful, often fail to capture the depth of human experience. In moments of profound suffering, grief, or even overwhelming joy, the human heart discovers that words collapse under the weight of emotion. What emerges instead are tears—an expression older and more primal than speech itself.

Aristotle noted that emotions are an essential part of human nature, not merely distractions to reason. Meanwhile, St. Augustine confessed that his own prayers were often carried more by sighs than by words because God listens not only to articulated speech but to the movements of the heart.

To weep, then, is not to fall into weakness but to transcend the inadequacy of language.

Tears are not meaningless droplets of water; they are signs of the soul reaching out to something greater. They embody sincerity. In a world where words can be manipulated, rehearsed, and even falsified, tears remain uncorrupted. One may lie with speech, but rarely with tears.

To cry in prayer is to present oneself before God in the most authentic form, stripped of pretense, vulnerable, and true.

St. John Chrysostom described tears as "a second baptism," a purification that renews the human spirit. Tears is a spiritual gift, a sign of God's grace softening the hardened hearts. Tears function not simply as a biological response but as a bridge between the finite and the infinite, the visible and the invisible.

Moreover, the act of weeping in prayer reveals a deep truth about the human condition: that we are beings of dependence. To cry before God is to admit that one has reached the edge of personal strength and must now entrust everything to the divine. In this sense, tears carry a paradoxical power. They signify weakness, yet at the same time, they manifest faith. For to weep in prayer is to believe—silently yet firmly—that someone is listening, even when no words are spoken.

This is why in the Christian tradition, tears are often considered more eloquent than speech.

The psalmist cries out, "You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your record?" (Psalm 56:8).

Such imagery suggests that God does not merely hear words but collects tears as precious prayers. It affirms that divine attention is not limited to language but extends to every hidden cry of the heart. Prayer is often defined as communication with the divine, yet communication is not limited to verbal language. Just as music, art, and silence can be modes of expression, so too can tears. They belong to what could be called the pre-verbal dimension of prayer—a raw, existential cry that transcends logical structures and enters into direct encounter with God.

Thus, when words fail, tears remain. They are not signs of defeat but of authenticity. They testify that prayer does not require eloquence but honesty. In fact, some of the most profound prayers are those uttered without a single word.

In the end, tears as prayer remind us that the human spirit is not confined by the boundaries of speech. Language may falter, but the soul still finds a way to reach God. And perhaps it is in these unspoken prayers—where weakness meets surrender—that the divine voice answers most

clearly.

About the Author

Also by Frank Balaba